

The Role of Caprivan Virtues in the Search for Common Moral Discourse

A Conversation with Peter J Paris

by

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Declaration:

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Signature: Date:



Abstract

The study examines virtues in Caprivi that has to be taken seriously by the church. This offers a position to promote the religio-culture of the community within the growing Christian churches. The call is to use story-telling in our liturgy to promote the cultural setting of passing on the message. The way preaching is currently done does not have similarity to the way the message of the gospel is to be told to the audience. The argument is therefore, that if the church wants to be relevant to the Caprivian community it should use the existing community virtues. The assignments will includes reference to Peter Paris' book who searches for an African and African American moral discourse. As the assignment will try to examine these virtues there is a need for suggesting a contributing way forward, in which Caprivian virtues can contribute to the virtues of the church.

Abstrak

Hierdie studie evalueer die waardes van die Kaprivi wat ernstige uitdagings aan die kerk stel. Dit bied ook 'n raamwerk om die religieuse kultuur van die gemeenskap binne 'n groeiende Christelike kerk te bevorder. Hier val groot klem op storievertelling binne die liturgie ten einde 'n bepaalde boodskap binne 'n kulturele situasie te kommunikeer. Die wyse waarop die evangelie tans oorgedra word maak egter nie erns met die waardes van die Kapriviaanse gemeenskap nie. Juis hierom word daar in hierdie navorsing sterk gefokus op Peter Paris se boek, waarin hy soek na 'n Afrika en Afrika-Amerikaanse morele raamwerk. Benewens 'n evaluering van die waardes van die Kapriviaanse gemeenskap, word daar ook meer konkreet gesoek na 'n nuwe werkswyse waardeur die waardes van die Kapriviaanse gemeenskap betekenisvol inwerk op die waardes van die kerk.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Background and Research Question.....	1
<i>1.1 Introduction.....</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>1.2. Hypothesis.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>1.3 Purpose.....</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>1.4 Methodology and structure</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>1.5 Motivation</i>	<i>6</i>
Chapter 2: Caprivian Worldviews.....	7
<i>2.1 Background History and Geography</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>2.2 Caprivian religio-culture and ethics</i>	<i>8</i>
2.2.1 Religious orientation	8
2.2.2 Caprivian Virtues	9
2.2.3 Practical Wisdom	9
2.2.4 The Virtue of Caring	10
2.2.5 Forbearance	11
2.2.6 Hospitality	11
<i>2.3 Caprivian Cosmological Understanding.....</i>	<i>12</i>
2.3.1 Understanding of God	13
2.3.2 Sin and evil.....	15
2.3.3 Caprivian spirituality	16
<i>2.4 Caprivian view of family and community.....</i>	<i>17</i>
2.4.1 Beliefs in Ancestors.....	19
2.4.2 African Christianity	21
2.4.3 Understanding and goal of moral life.....	21
2.4.4 Healing	24
2.5 Conclusion.....	24

Chapter 3: Peter Paris' Virtue Theory.....	26
<i>3.1 Intellectual Biography of Paris</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>3.2 Peter Paris' view of African and American Virtues.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>3.3 Influences.....</i>	<i>28</i>
<i>3.4 Paris' Virtue Theory.....</i>	<i>29</i>
Chapter 4: Christian and Caprivian Virtues in a Dialogue	33
<i>4.1 Introduction</i>	<i>33</i>
<i>4.2 Challenge of and Need for Dialogue.....</i>	<i>34</i>
<i>4.3 Comparison with Paris' Theory.....</i>	<i>36</i>
<i>4.4 Moral Guidance</i>	<i>38</i>
<i>4.5 Conclusion.....</i>	<i>41</i>
Bibliography.....	43



CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION

1.1 Introduction

Story-telling is an integral part of moral (community) formation in Caprivi and my grand father took time in the evening¹ to tell stories of the past. The family gathered in his parlour after supper, at which time announcements for the next day's assignments were made, individual complaints tabled and resolved, and deliberations on the common understanding of the future made. Thereafter, my grandfather would take the stage to tell his stories. He remembered many stories about the past, how he first met his wife, as well as the first day of his marriage. He was a man of great reputation in the community as well as a good husband.

He admired the past and wished that the hands of the clock could turn back. As a Caprivian, he believed in the crucial role of story telling, and even on his death bed, he told stories. He wanted his most beloved son to understand the implication of his impending death and how he would become responsible for the upkeep of the other children, the grand children, and other members of the family and the community. In the Caprivian society, such last words of a dying person are taken very seriously and in modern times can be compared to a will. In most cases, it is the responsibility of elders to pass on a will to younger generations, to whom it would serve as a 'manual of instructions'. As in most African societies, oral tradition is a non-negotiable aspect of community-based moral formation in Namibia, and this is a practice amongst the Caprivians.

Magesa (1997:69) affirms:

"It is the responsibility of the religious leaders of the society, as well as the elders in the household, to pass on orally and be example of all the moral codes of the clan and ethnic group from generation to generation. Only by properly living life in this world, as indicated by tradition, are the individual and the community guaranteed life beyond. Leaders have a unique responsibility to pass on the tradition because, by virtue of their being leaders, they are ontologically in closer union and communication with God and ancestors than the rest of the population."

Current trends and recent discoveries in human and social sciences have paid less attention to the role the social context plays in the formation of moral notions and behaviour. Today's

¹ Normally the family gathers after supper, the last meal of the day. This was the time elders used to tell stories, because during the day everybody is busy.

Caprivians tend to identify with Christian groups whose interests and concerns are centred on their own projects and are disconnected from the indigenous religion. As a result of this, the Caprivians' religion which functions as a social ethics that plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' common perceptions and values is relegated to the background. The "religio-culture" (that is, culture that is inseparably grounded in religion), the communal spirituality that is rooted in the Namibian conviction of life and existence as evolving from, and revolving around a Creator of nature and human beings, is being replaced with a separatist, divisive, individualistic, intellectual, and abstract culture, which draws its spiritualities from a Seventh Day Adventists' dominated Christianity.

This invasion of Caprivian culture by Christianity is what is popularly known in the so-called Third World as "cultural imperialism" or what Stuart (2002:67) describes from his South African experience as "ideological hegemony" and "cultural transfer" respectively. This development is accompanied and assisted by fast changing and influential contemporary technologies and media trends in the world. The varieties of ethical options and view-points that result from this are often conflicting and hardly reconcilable with traditional Caprivian virtues and worldviews. This becomes more pronounced when one attempts to take Namibian (Caprivian) traditions seriously, especially its worldview, cultural diversity and philosophy. If virtue is considered as the basis for ethical formation and decision making in which people are influenced through relationships, Caprivian virtues then can be regarded as evolving and revolving around their identity, personhood, family, community, and their understanding of life, among other things. One can argue that Christianity in Caprivi is anti-cultural, while Caprivian religion can rather be described as "religiosity", that is, the religious understanding and practice of a people in contrast to religion understood as a system. One is therefore left to wonder if the Christian transformation of Caprivian culture is biblical, and if it must be uniform.

Jesus Christ, "the author and the finisher" of the Christian faith (Heb. 12:2) may also have emphasised transformation for the fulfilment of traditions, rather than their annihilation, when he underscored in Matt 5:7 that he has not come to abolish the law and prophets, but to fulfil them. In the same vein John Howard Yoder (1996: 41, 43, 45) writes from his western experience that:

"Transformation takes into itself all the value of its predecessor types and corrects most of their short comings, certainly there is nothing wrong with simplifying and classifying, as we seek to understand real history, especially *reality* in its diversity and

originality [...] A typology [...] which throws some needed light on the very nature of those things classified, or the logic of how the work in mind or in cultures.”

Such positions would fascinate Kalu (2005:12) as expressed in one of his views on an African Church History, that:

“The way the term history is used betrays the fact that the Christian faith imposes certain perspective on interpreting history (in this case, virtues, CS). It imposes a certain underlying meaning which forces theological (or ethical) perception of historical events. It subjects our understanding of the past to the ultimate reasons as well as the future of creation in most African societies.”

Virtue theory is viewed as rules and conducts that are learned and lived out in the community. Hence, Peter Paris (1995:133-4) writes that:

“The basis of this ethic in the common world view of African and African American peoples separates it significantly from other traditions of virtue ethics that draw their source material from different cultural situations in order to address the moral issues implicit in those contexts. As in all theories of moral virtue, African and American virtues are dispositions that are innate. They are acquired by habitual practices, preferably begun in early childhood through teaching and practice.”

In fact, Africans view religious devotion and good life habits as necessary conditions for the prevention and solution of most practical problems encountered in daily life. It is virtually inconceivable for Africans to think of human existence outside its dependence on God, divinities, and ancestral spirits in order to solve their daily problems which are believed to come as a result of incursions of evil forces.

The culture of the community has been a source of moral authority and this has been regarded as a heritage. However, as in other African communities cultural diversity is regarded as a natural blessing. It has a rich history in different communities. This point is emphasized by John Mbiti (1975:3) whose claim is that:

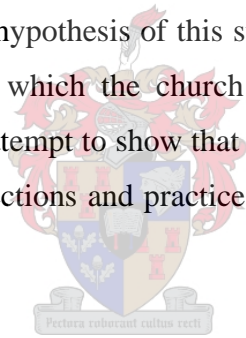
“African heritage is rich, but it is not uniform. It has similarities, but there are also differences from time to time, from place to place, and from people to people.”

Paris on the other hand, is looking for a common discourse within Africa and its Diaspora in terms of virtues. Against this background, certain questions need to be addressed in the course of this study:

1. What is the cosmological understanding of the Caprivian people and their view of the embodiment of spirits and ancestors?
2. How can Caprivians function in contemporary Caprivian community without a critical interference of the notion of transgression as seen from the perspective of Christianity? In other words, are there more virtues that the Church in Caprivi can adopt from the local community in order to articulate and demonstrate a more fulfilling ethics for the community?

1.2. Hypothesis

It may not be seen as an over statement to suggest that Christianity as practised in Namibia is contrary to the Caprivian religio-culture. As a result of this, there is Christian ethics identity crisis in this Namibian society. The hypothesis of this study therefore is that there are ethical virtues in Caprivian religio-culture which the church can adopt for a more feasible and fulfilling ethical practice. We shall attempt to show that the Caprivian church can make use of local virtues to make its ethical reflections and practices more meaningful and more realistic in contemporary Caprivian society.



1.3 Purpose

The goal of the study is to understand, articulate and retrieve Caprivian virtues that can assist the church in this Namibian society to be more relevant and to fulfill its calling as the 'salt' of the society.

A Christian ethic that encourages the Caprivian value system of communal relationship to continue because it works better for the contemporary Caprivian culture and peoples may prove to be a way forward in attaining spirituality. This view is reiterated by Friday Mbon who argues that:

“African social ethics could promote sound socio-economic growth and overall development of contemporary African society”.

He continues to urge for a deliberation on the responsibility confronting the African nations

and has even prescribed a remedy that warrants our serious consideration, in Olupona (1991: 101-3).

1.4 Methodology and structure

The methodology used in carrying out this assignment is “non empirical”, (Mouton 2001: 175-180). It draws from available books and resources, but principally from the outstanding work of Peter Paris on Virtue Theory. The chapters that follow are divided into four parts:

Chapter One of the essay deals with the background and the research question of the essay. The value of religio-culture (cultural understanding) and story telling as a way of passing Christian message to people. The hypothesis of the essay is that there are ethical virtues in Caprivian religio-culture which the church can adopt for a more feasible and fulfilling ethical practice. We shall attempt to show that the Caprivian church can make use of local virtues to make its ethical reflections and practices more meaningful and more realistic in contemporary Caprivian society. The goal of the research is to have wider Caprivian understanding of Christian ethics and philosophy.

Chapter Two considers the virtues pointed by Peter Paris for African American society as a starting point for evaluating (compare) to the virtues ethics and spirituality of the Caprivian peoples of Namibia. This includes the understanding of their world, God, and the virtues.

Chapter Three is an overview of Peter Paris’ book *The Spirituality of African People: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse*. The book contains the discussion of an African understanding of God, ancestral spirits, the value of communal allegiance and bond, the African view of personhood, family, African, and African American virtues and ethics. Attention is paid to traditional religions as institutions in the context of contemporary African cultural diversity. This book examines the firmness of African spirituality that continues in African American religious life.

Chapter Four is a proposal (or conceptual engagement regarding the need) for a conversation between Caprivian religio-culture and Christian virtues in search for common moral discourse. The observation that family and community are indispensable in moral formation is important if we put in view that this study is a call for a common moral discourse between

Christianity and the Caprivian's view of virtue. Therefore, the conclusion is that story telling is a practice which can be used for transmitting the gospel message in a religio-culture setting such as that of the Caprivian context.

1.5 Motivation

As stated in the Introduction, Christianity has so greatly influenced Caprivians that traditional values are adjudged by comparing them with an imperialistic Christian standard and values to the detriment of culture. Lamentably, received Christian ethics in Caprivi disrespect and demonize cultural practices, including the veneration of ancestors as negative spirituality. This and other problems have served as a motivation for the current investigation of the distortion and the degradation suffered by the receiving culture. The views of a Nigerian-born African Church historian Ogbu U. Kalu (2005:1) is expressed in his Igbo proverb that a “person who does not know where the rain met him/her is unlikely to know his/her destination.” This lends credence to the fact that the acknowledgement of the source of a problem can provide a means of moving forward.



CHAPTER 2: CAPRIVIAN WORLDVIEWS

2.1 Background History and Geography

The Caprivi Strip is a narrow piece of land about 400 kilometres long, in the far North-East of Namibia. During the colonial period, the Caprivi was called “Eastern Caprivi Zipfel” (Pretorius 1971:1). The East Caprivi is bordered by the Kwando Linyanti known as Chobe (Pretorius 1971:1). The Southern border follows a straight line parallel to the northern border and 30 kilometers south of it from the Kavango to the Linyanti River, from there it follows the main stream of the Linyanti as far as the main stream of the Zambezi River (where Linyanti is also known as the Chobe). The Zambezi River is a region of swamps and flood plains and the Caprivi Strip was obtained from Great Britain by Germany in 1890 to give German South West Africa (now Namibia) access to the Zambezi River, west of Victoria Falls. Originally part of Botswana and referred to as (Bechuanaland), the Caprivi was ceded by Britain to the Germans in a complicated land exchange deal designed to link German colonies from the west to the east of Africa.

Buys & Nambala (2003:130) say of Caprivi:

“Due to its geographical position on the map of Africa, the history of Caprivi was always linked directly to the histories of its neighbouring countries, opposite the great rivers: Kwando, Zambezi, Chobe and Linyanti. Geographically, demographically, economically and even culturally, Caprivi was always much closer to Zambia, Zimbabwe and Botswana, than to central Namibia. Extensive literature is available on the effects of the colonial ‘scramble for Africa’ in the previous century....”

In the 1970s and 1980s, the territory was used as a rear base by the South African army at the height of the apartheid era in its war against the Namibian independence movement, South West Africa People’s Organisation (SWAPO), which is Namibia’s ruling party today.

The Caprivi is considered strategically important in Namibia because it is a narrow panhandle extending out from Namibia's northern border and is contiguous with four other countries, namely Botswana in the south, Angola and Zambia in the north and Zimbabwe in the east. It is also important because some of the arid southern African region's most important rivers,

including the Zambezi and the Okavango, run along or through it. And as a popular destination for international tourists, the Caprivi brings in hard currency to the national coffers of Namibia.

The Caprivian population is about 92,000 and this is approximately 3.7% of the Namibian population” (Buys & Nambala 2003: xxiii). Caprivians are Lozi-speaking (the official language in schools and it is regarded as a mother tongue) and share a common history and culture with Lozis across the border in Zambia. The region is dominated by two tribes, the Mafwe and Vasubia, and in the west on the banks of the Kavango are the Mbukushu usually classified with the Kavango people. In the east are Subia and Fwe tribes and the others including Yeyi, Totela, Mashi, Bushmen (Makwengo), Mbalangwe, and the Lozi community. Outside Namibia the Caprivians are ethnically related to the Lozi (Luyana, or Luyi) and the Kololo (Bafokeng) people in Barotseland, Zambia (Buys & Nambala 2003: xxvii). All these tribes make up their ancestral kingdom, known as Barotseland. The Caprivians identify with the rest of Namibia, as Namibians and they are socially inclined.



2.2 Caprivian religio-culture and ethics

As observed in 1.1, the Caprivian ethics is influenced by religion which is seen as a primary source of life. In addition, the long periods of dominance of the Caprivi tribes by the Lozi and the Kololo kingdoms, exerted tremendous influence on their customs.²

Buys & Nambala (2003: xxviii) record that *Caprivians* practise a mixed economy of pastoral farming, hoe-farming, hunting, gathering and fishing. The Lozi pasture great herds of cattle and practise agriculture.

2.2.1 Religious orientation

Caprivians are traditionally religious people like any other African people. Even though their religious practice is associated with ancestors and nature, they have a comprehensive understanding of God as the Creator of all things.

² The kingship and traditional values are Lozi oriented.

Traditionally, several places in the Caprivi region, such as, under the Baobab trees, in the thick bushes, and some deep spots in the river, are still associated with religion. The Caprivian religio-culture resembles the Israelite cult, on views such as polygamy; abstinence from certain food, and payment of bride price (lobola). Most rituals take place when there is less rain; ancestors are then consulted.

There does not appear to be a long history of Protestant churches around the region, but Buys & Nambala (2003:xxviii) trace the first Christian contact in Eastern Caprivi to David Livingstone of the London Missionary Society (LMS) who launched an unsuccessful mission to the area in 1860.³ The Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) later became the first Christian group to plant churches around the region. The Seventh Day Adventist missionaries started their mission in Caprivi in 1921 while the Roman Catholic Church began their ministry in 1940. The Dutch Reformed Church followed suit with their mission in the 1960s. However, it is clear today that the received Christianity is anti-Caprivian culture, even though Caprivi has its own culture of virtue.



2.2.2 Caprivian Virtues

Caprivian moral virtue is made up of practical wisdom, caring, forbearance, and forgiveness. These virtues are among others, but for the present conversation with Paris' work, we shall identify some of the same virtues which he discusses in order to search for common moral discourse. To this is added hospitality as seen by Caprivian a virtue which is non negotiable.

2.2.3 Practical Wisdom

Practical wisdom is highly practised by Caprivians especially with respect to the moral formation in children. Traditionally, a child is allowed to go to the grand parents to learn about life. In some cases someone who knows the language, the taboos, and the cultural/moral instruction may be privileged to also pass this wisdom to children. This cultural education that

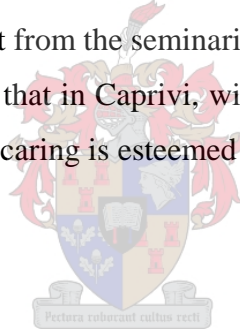
³ There are several reasons for the unsuccessful attempt of this mission in Caprivi, one of which was that at that time, adherence to local culture was non-negotiable and the people also where not familiar with English. Secondly, Caprivians prefer people to follow what they do but Livingstone started evangelizing before he was even accepted as a resident.(own emphasis CS)

is normally taught in the village prepares the child for the future. Language is considered important for wisdom, and like all the virtues, practical wisdom is the excellent exercise of a skill. Since this also pertains to the art of discerning the best means to the attainment of goals, it is calculative in nature.

A parallel example of this kind of wisdom instruction is observable in the Uniting Reformed Church and other churches which practice a similar system with their theological students. A student is obliged to stay under a pastor for a year of practical training, during which the pastor will influence him for ministry. This can be regarded as practical wisdom because the pastor does not distance himself from the student but is rather involved in his daily activities.

In a different vein, when the issue of conducting funeral services arises, many seminaries do not teach on how to lay the dead to rest and the Bible also is silent on this point of ethics concerning the dead and the living. The community, on the other hand, teaches its own people how to conduct funeral services, and the ethics surrounding the dead. This wisdom is only acquired from the community and not from the seminaries.

In addition to this, it is worth noting that in Caprivi, wisdom is always a public virtue, which is part of a person's credibility while caring is esteemed as a non-negotiable virtue.



2.2.4 The Virtue of Caring

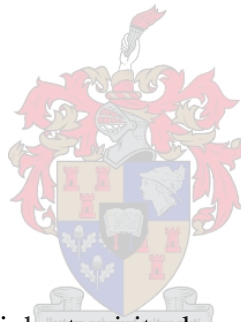
The art of welcoming in Caprivian culture shows a people who care and look after others. A typical Caprivian family welcomes a guest with food, water to bathe, a place of privacy and the freedom to be a part of the household and environment. This caring virtue is a natural picture of the people's moral ethics based on the collective concern of the people to practise good deeds. Caring is an act of love. As a community practice among the Caprivian people, caring is regarded as one of the highest virtues in human relationship and has the same value as hospitality.

Hospitality is a way in which care is demonstrated to people, it is never a selective virtue but it takes care of all - strangers, community members, and other living things such as dogs and other animals. Caring, then, is regarded as a moral duty not only to the family but to the entire nation. Caprivians are a caring people, not only on an ethnic level but on a national level of

relationship. For this reason, the Caprivian community has a virtue of forbearance which is considered a good moral.

2.2.5 Forbearance

Forbearance is a Caprivian virtue that appeals to people to tolerate others and to exercise restraint in difficult circumstances. Such tolerance or patience compels people to be ‘slow to anger’. Forbearance as a virtue is not so much about rules but about attitudes, habits, and behaviour which allow us to take part in our daily activities. It is therefore not just an individual practice but a collective one. Thus, it is only by taking the virtues on, and exploring them, and living them out, that one comes to join in that way of life and learn what it is about. Caprivians esteem and appreciate the cultivation of virtues in which forbearance has a place in the art of learning to live faithfully in this confused world. Hence, we need to take cognisance of that in order to partake in the character and life of God, and to explore the resources that are available therein.



2.2.6 Hospitality

Hospitality can be described as the highest spiritual moral virtue in the Caprivian context. To be human must mean to be hospitable as this is regarded as a joyful participation in divine and privileged responsibility to save others for the common good. These privileged responsibilities are pursued with the morals that are “concerned with hospitality to relatives, friends and strangers. It is considered a moral evil to deny hospitality, even to a stranger. Therefore, when people travel they may stop any where for the night and receive hospitality in that homestead” (Mbiti 1975: 177).

Should not this style of hospitality be taken seriously by the church in Namibia, and in other parts of the Christian world? Caprivian hospitality is connected to morality, and the wholeness of human being towards God. The importance of this point can be attested to even in the history of some other world civilizations, as Pohl (1995:5) shows:

“In a number of ancient civilizations, hospitality was viewed as a pillar on which all morality rested, it encompassed the good. For the people of ancient Israel understand

themselves as strangers and sojourners, with responsibility to care for vulnerable strangers in their midst, was part of what it meant to be the people of God.”

A hostile person is seen as evil and unfit as far as community values are concerned. Hospitality is a virtue learned from childhood, as one is taught to make strangers feel at home by offering them seats, and water to drink, even in the absence of the elders. Ancestors (the living dead), also demand hospitality from their family, especially at meal times when a little part of the food is thrown on the ground as an offering to ancestors.

In many cultures of Namibia, African hospitality is taught as a moral obligation to the living, to ancestors and to God and this spiritual orientation makes no distinction between poor and rich visitors – all receive fair treatment. This treatment includes primary things like giving food, and accommodation among others. Hospitality was a virtue used by other cultures in Africa to increase their population because if a culture is hospitable, strangers would feel free to settle among the people and surrender their own cultures so as to truly belong. In Africa, institutions for hospitality such as hotels, restaurants, guest-houses and lodges are not traditionally found; rather, personal properties function as hospitality items. Pohl (1999: 57) observes that:

“Hospitality is a personal but institutionally rooted practice. It requires institution with an identity, history, and purpose, whether family, church, or larger community. Effective practices of hospitality are dependent, in part on the viability of the institution in which the practice is embedded. Contemporary attempts to recover the practice of hospitality are made more complex by the modern realities of highly specialized large scale institutions, cultural pluralism, and concerns about the institutions viability of the family and the church.”

Through this understanding of doing good to others, it is believed that the ancestors are well-pleased and at that the same time, the living family members are happy.

2.3 Caprivian Cosmological Understanding

The Caprivian worldview is deeply grounded in its religio-culture as already observed in 1.1 and they affirm the existence of a creator who created nature and human beings.

2.3.1 Understanding of God

Caprivians believe that humanity is subject to the creator of all things and they are to develop a relationship with him through the ancestors. This creator is understood to be older than all creation and is believed to be powerful and strong. He has done his part in creation and now creation is expected to do what he requires it to do. Olupona says that the primary function of God is to create the universe; the “secondary” divinities are in charge of the every-day to-day life of the community (2000: xxi).

In the contemporary Caprivian culture, the idea of the existence of a supreme being generally remains at the background of daily religious life. For instance, when one receives good news he gives thanks to God by looking at the sky or lifting his hands to the sky; and when troubles come he asks God for the cause. This understanding of God is attached to ancestors who are believed to be immanent, not transcendent, and whose relationship to human beings is basically mutual and interdependent. Hence, their very nature is essentially bound up with human experience. The Caprivians seem to agree with Psalm 14:1 (KJV) which states that:

The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good.

Thus in Caprivi it is rare to find such people who do not believe in God – who forsake God. Nature contributes a lot to the cultural understanding of God, and a general revelation is associated with the idea of *nyambi oparutara*⁴. The idea of God being figured in nature and the desire to see God with naked eyes is therefore a contributing factor for making images or create a space for practical demonstration. Therefore when a Caprivian looks at nature, he sees the works of the creator. Mbiti (1969: 2) observes that:

“Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the

⁴ *Nyami oparutara* (Mbukushu tribe) this is *God* who is praised by beating the drums the whole day. This *God* then comes near and dances with the people, I have been part of this ritual and experienced the meaning of praising *God* with community ritual, as a practice among the Mbukushu tribe of Namibia in Caprivi. What happens here is that they build a thatched roof where *God* is believed to come and sit while the people dance underneath this thatched roof, strangely, as the men and women sing and dance, no one looks on top of this roof to see this *God*, but continue to dance. According to this tribe they witnessed two members of their community taken to heaven during the same ritual ceremony. These two men flayed together with their drums between the legs, and are thus revered as ancestors due to their spiritual highness during the same ceremonies (this is my self explanation of the event and observation. C.S).

house of parliament. Although many African languages do not have a word for religion as such, it nevertheless accompanies the individual from long before his birth to long after his physical death.”

The idea of carrying his/her religion is for guidance and protection as his gods are known through personal encounter as living agents directly affecting people’s lives. The question that arises at this juncture is: what can this African religious approach offer to the understanding of God’s omnipresence? A God who is only in heaven may not be able to offer much hope when we talk of pressing contemporary problems, but *Immanuel*, God with us, assures us of hope.

In Caprivi, as in most African cultures and religious beliefs, God is the creator of all things. Mbiti (1975:44) offers us two general concepts of the African view of creation by stating that:

“It is believed in some societies that when God was in the process of making all things, he made helpers or assistants whom he put in charge of making all certain things under his supervision and direction. But in most African societies, people believe that God alone was responsible for making everything without a helper and without an assistant.”

Thus, in spite of the many different cultures in Africa, there is little to argue regarding the morality attached to the Creator and his authority over creation. All believe that this monotheist Creator God desires to see human beings conducting themselves very well because he gave them his creation to use and they are also a part of his creation.

God is also seen as unique, good, just, and is believed to be sitting on his throne with his eyes over all of creation for better governance.

It is strongly believed that God rules in perfect justice. Therefore he is also referred to as the judge. People say that he judges all things justly, distributes all things justly rescues the oppressed and punishes the wrongdoer (Mbiti 1975:46).

From the above view of God as a ruler, we may also draw a parallel with the system of chieftaincy among Caprivians. A chief is called *Mulena*⁵ and the same name is also used to refer to God. The *Mulena* is therefore responsible for passing judgments and ruling and he is

⁵ *Mulena* is a Lozi name given to someone who is above reproach, and only kings, chiefs and God fall into this category. In all the seven tribes within the region, the same expression can be found. The Lozi language is the language taught in schools as Caprivians’ mother tongue.

supposed to be good. In Caprivian tradition, an ordinary man cannot approach the chief on his/her own, but has to go through the palace messengers whose duty it is to relay a message to the chief. The chief may then decide to grant the visitor an audience or refer him to a subordinate. This shows how the community views God with their human hierarchy; the church can bring its teaching in line with this understanding of *Mulena* and God. When this *Mulena* wants to address people they come to him and listen in a 'parlour gathering' of sort and stories are told there or issues which need judgment are discussed.

The Caprivians therefore, view God as having a great influence on the virtues, the spirituality and the ethical conduct of the people in a world of sin and evil. Forgiveness is embraced for better community of brother/sisterhood. Whereas, sin is noted as a threat to the community and the only way to live together is through showing love and forgiving one another.

2.3.2 Sin and evil

Sin and evil are attributed to faulty familial moral formation. Moral formation itself is seen as dependent on religion and Caprivians consider religion as a heritage of their culture. It is inherited from one's family as practitioners:

"A person must be born to a particular African people in order to be able to follow African religion in that group. It would be meaningless and useless to try and transplant it to an entirely different society outside Africa, unless African peoples themselves go with it there (Mbiti 1975:13)."

In Caprivi, "... religion is an essential part of the way of life of each people. Its influence covers all of life, from before the birth of a person to long after he died" (Mbiti 1975: 13-14). Thus sin and evil are regarded as fallouts of religion.

It is amazing to observe that the religion of the people of Caprivi survive without formal institutions for its spirituality. Unlike Christianity and other religions, Caprivian ethics thrive on religion as a means of check-mating the dangers of sin and evil, yet it has no known founders. Mbiti (1975: 15) points out that:

Just as there were no founders of African religion, there have been no reformers, preachers, or missionaries to change it, improve it, or to take it overseas to other continents.

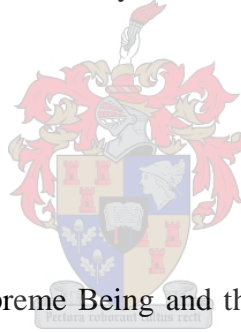
Therefore,

“African religion is very pragmatic and realistic. It is applied to a situation as the need arises. The followers of African religion are not bound by any authority which goes back in history” (Mbiti 1975:15).

Ethics is embedded in Caprivian religiosity with people conducting themselves using religion as a mirror. The observation that family and community are indispensable in moral formation is important if we recall that this study is a call for a common moral discourse between Christianity and the Caprivian’s view of virtue. At this point, we can only agree with Pobee’s (1979:102) that:

“African nations as they assert their rightful places in the community of nations and men, must take seriously issues of morality, sin, and goodness”.

These same issues need to be taken seriously in the case of the Caprivi people. Sin is an enemy of family and community.



2.3.3 Caprivian spirituality

Caprivians understanding of the Supreme Being and their relationship to Him is heightened by the belief that human beings are tasked by God to do good and God seems to be watching how this task is fulfilled. Writing from a general African perspective, Zahan points out that:

“Among the significant elements of the knowledge of the nature of God, the distancing of him is undoubtedly the most widespread and the most firmly rooted in the belief of Africa. Humans, earth dwellers par excellence, see the Divine Being, both in space and in emotional perception, as an entity so distant that it is sometimes impossible to name it and especially to address invocation or to devote cults to it.” (in: Olupona 2000:5).

Such relationship is not encountered on personal levels, but in relationship with divinities which includes but is not limited to ancestors - an encounter with spirituality or the higher being through the individuals is demonstrated in moral upright living everyday in the community.

Thus, the position of ancestors remains significant in the spirituality of Caprivian peoples. Since spirituality can be subjected to a tree, bush, or any object which is believed to have supernatural power, it is therefore said that spirituality can not be specific. Hence the increasing tension for the call of churches to understand the concept of ancestral roles.

At this point, it is worth noting that there are many diverse definitions of spirituality and this diversity is a global challenge to the church today. African cultural spirituality highlights a person's connectedness to God, to his human roots, to others, and to the rest of nature. In Christianity, spirituality is often described as the experience of the Holy Spirit moving the believer and the communities to be life-giving and life-affirming, as Olupona (2000:3) notes that:

“‘Zahan Dominique’ identifies two kinds of spirituality, ‘the later religions are above else based on relationships with the invisible and are the products of a code of love. The religious experience in this case results from the love of God for his creatures and the love of these creatures for their Creator. The spirituality of *l’Homme Noir*, on the other hand, does not appear to confine itself to such a conceptual construction. The Traditional African religion is devoid of their notion of original sin. The African lives in a state of *anamartesis*, which cannot be fully appreciated by revealed religions.”

Therefore, Caprivian spirituality is a cry for life and for the power to resist death and the agents of death. It provides the strength to go on, for it is the assurance that God is in the struggle. This spirituality is cherished without compromise because their beloved ones, the ancestors, are a part of it.

2.4 Caprivian view of family and community

Communal life as we have noted, is indispensable in this Namibian society and the criteria for belonging to the community is not restricted to blood relationships. Unlike in the Western world where the emphasis is on the nuclear family, the Caprivian family ethic is communal. It caters for all and ensures that no one lives as an island. The Caprivian ideology is not based on the individual but on the family and community. For instance, personal calling of one's name is not encouraged but an individual is referred to as either, ‘Papa’ or ‘Mama’; ‘Brother’, or ‘Uncle’ etc. The advantage of calling a person on the basis of relationship rather than name is that it keeps the family and community values on a high level.

Moreover, among the Fwe people of Namibia, who are also Caprivians, parents-in-law are accepted as one's blood parents and are addressed as such. It is also accepted for a man to have more than one wife. Polygamy was accepted as a method of extending the family and the community but things are changing due to the threat of HIV infection. It is possible then that the norm for acceptable conduct within a culture changes as the culture shifts its ethical stand. Family ethics is not only about right or wrong but is the responsibility of every member towards one another to ensure that the social virtues are upheld.

Unfortunately, the borrowing of and adaptation of western values which are based on a capitalist economy have made communal ethics difficult to sustain. Many families and relations which were hitherto closely-knit have become distanced from one another. Due to economic hardship, and urban-migration from rural areas that compels many people to move away from their extended families the situation has become more glaring. Moreover, the struggle to adapt to the many different cultures in cities makes it difficult for extended family members to unite like before. The menace of economic hardship has therefore become a general threat to communal life in Namibia, but amongst the Caprivian, in particular.

However, even though the new economic system in Namibia does not allow many people to uphold their ethics and moral virtues, the church can benefit from the Caprivian virtue of communal religion, especially the concept of regarding all clan and community members as family even when they are not related by blood.

Unlike the political ideology which excluded non-blacks during the struggle against apartheid in Namibia, the primary virtue and ethics of the people of Caprivi and their concept of personhood demonstrate that "an individual exists corporately in terms of the family, clan and whole ethnic group" (Kasenene 1994:141). The value of this relationship is based on the *ubuntu* theory which in most African cultures is used as an idea of self-value in communion with others.

In common parlance, the concept of *ubuntu* declares that an individual is a person because of others and through others. This principle is clearly expressed by Paris (1995:101):

The African person is defined as a member of a family, and so the African person is never alone either in self-concept or in the perception of others ... one can rightly claim that the African person is related to the family as part of a living organism is

related to the whole. ... So the life of a person is wholly dependent on the family and its symbiotic function of biological lineage, communal nurture, and moral formation.”

The Caprivians practise the same principle and a Caprivian who disregards the family or community in preference to personal interests is viewed as anti-social. His excessive individualism is regarded as a denial or abuse of the corporate existence. This view is affirmed by Kasenene (1994:141):

“African societies emphasize interdependence and individual obligations to the community exist to work for the promotion of the community’s welfare by doing good and avoiding evil.”

Thus, it is one’s moral duty to see that others do not suffer but equally enjoy ‘shalom’. Broodryk (2002:83) reiterates this from an agrarian perspective saying that:

“At ploughing time, members of one family would offer their services to their neighbours, who would in turn lend oxen with which to plough their mealie fields.”

Can the church in Namibia not adapt this method as a means of reaching out to those who are in need and deprived? Would this system not reduce economic gap between the rich and the poor and make resources available to all?

Do they not demonstrate that our uncompromising concern to ameliorate suffering is an integral part of Caprivian belief in ancestors?

2.4.1 Beliefs in Ancestors

There is a need for Caprivians to do a comprehensive study of the ancestors and their spiritual capabilities. In Caprivi, the spirituality of the family rests on its ability to maintain the relationship between the departed and the living. This relationship is maintained as a special tribute to the departed, that is, the ancestors. Mbiti (1969:25) describes ancestors as ‘the living dead’ (the living-dead is a person who is physically dead but alive in the memory of those who knew him in his life as well as being alive in the world of the spirit).

Caprivians believe that the living dead have capabilities to intercede for the living before God, because they no longer experience the limitations of human beings in the flesh. Ancestors are

believed to be involved in family affairs by becoming spiritual protectors or guides. The communion between the living and the ancestors never ends, it goes on forever. It is a common belief as well that ancestors are clothed with supernatural power from the Creator and are, therefore, capable of protecting the members of their family, clan and community wherever these members are. Moreover, they are believed to have needs just like their surviving descendants and it is the responsibility of the living to meet the ancestors' needs. The failure to do so can result in retribution which could be in form of a sickness or a misfortune.

This expectation of becoming a spiritual being at death, gives a spiritual goal to the Caprivian while here on earth. Can this not dispel the false notion that Caprivians worship their ancestors one may ask? By the way, do not the pastors request their congregants or parishioners to stand and observe moments of silence for those who died of AIDS pandemic, accidents etc? Do not ancestors contribute in building peaceable and liveable society vis-à-vis, their role in the family?

Ancestors act as spiritual agents, guides and guardians of the living. They have existed for so long and their moral values are followed by the living. Their graves as well as personal possessions such as walking sticks or clothes serve as points and objects of refuge and repose to the living. Thus, it is believed that ancestors continue their role by intermingling with the living through dreams, appearances, and visions. Most families also dread the anger of their

ancestors, and Magesa points out that ancestors are patient and kind possessing a godly image. He states that “the patience of the ancestors in view of the mistakes and wrongdoing of the living is a point of crucial importance in the moral view of African religion. Just as God does, the ancestors will refrain from bringing misfortune onto their descendants unless it is extremely necessary to remind them of the demands of the order of the universe for their own good”. Olupona (2000:13) concurs by observing that:

“In appearance, the cult of the ancestors seems very simplistic, whereas in reality it is as complex as the public cult of Christian churches” (Olupona 2000:13).

Can we then draw that our knowledge of the status, role and function of the ancestors can help us even more to grasp the deep theological and biblical meaning of Christ's mediatory role in African societies? The role of this influence on Caprivian, and indeed, on African spirituality appears obvious.

2.4.2 African Christianity

The belief in the existence of ancestors and spirits is esteemed by most Africans, including Christians. Many suppose that the African belief in ancestors and spirits make it easy for Africans to grasp the Christian understanding of the worship of God.

However, the issue of ancestors in African spirituality remains a challenge for churches to articulate and deal with because it is also at the core of African Christianity. Africans believe that they are surrounded by the spirit world and most contemporary Africans believe that both ancestral and nature spirits, which are the intermediaries between them and the Creator God, inspire them. On the other hand, African Christians believe that Christianity is Christ-centred and is an inspiration from the Holy Spirit with Christ as the mediator between the Christians and God. As a result of this, many Africans who become Christians become somewhat confused because they cannot reconcile the differences between African and Christian beliefs. But Turaki (2006: 24) provides a possible way forward by asserting that:

“We do not make Jesus the Messiah look like one of the ancestors, but he can be presented symbolically as one who fulfils the aspirations of those who depend upon the ancestors and therefore stands as their mediator. Our knowledge of the status, role and function of the ancestors can help us grasp even more the deep theological and the biblical meaning of Christ’s mediatory role in African society.”

It appears that Turaki’s position can be considered in line with our earlier observation in 2.3.7, above that the hope of becoming ancestors at death provides a spiritual goal for many Caprivians. Perhaps we can also ask at this stage, what is the understanding and goal of life for Caprivians as Africans?

2.4.3 Understanding and goal of moral life

Caprivians believe that life is the greatest gift of God to human beings; hence, one is expected to conduct himself/herself in appreciation of this gift. A good life is considered an achievement of the moral person whose life goal is set for the community. Kasenene (1994:140) affirms that:

“Any action which increases life or vital force is right, and whatever decreases it, is wrong”.

Doing evil to others is moral wrong and it is sin. He goes further to claim that:

“All agree that the community is a sacred phenomenon created by the supreme God, protected by the divinities, and governed by the ancestral spirit. Thus, full participation in the community is a fundamental requirement of all human” (1994:140).

This is an active and objective participation in communal affairs (especially on issues that build up morality), in which the protection and appreciation of the individuals is grounded. Such a morally sound life is generally believed to metamorphose into a happy and fulfilling old age in the Caprivian worldview.

Consequently, the death of a youth is received with mixed feelings and Caprivians would insist on finding out the cause of such a death. Again, if one dies without children it is regarded as a misfortune for which rituals have to be performed on behalf of the deceased. In such a case, Caprivians would insert a hot charcoal between the buttocks of the dead, so that this dead person can proceed on his pilgrimage with his/her misfortune. In recent times however, this practice has changed. Of course, there is always a remarkable difference when a moral elderly person dies - it is a celebration which is grounded in the African belief of the continuity of life after death.

Paris notes that:

“In African worldview, there is no death in the sense of radical separation from either the family or the tribal community... Africans believe that life is eternal and that its motion is not linear but cyclical. In fact, they are convinced that the temporal movement of human life is a continuous cyclical process from the realm of spirit to that of history” (1995: 52).

For Caprivians, every one is believed to have a continuation of life in the ancestral world but not every one has the same destiny. For instance, it is believed that when witches die, they turn to bad spirits. Henceforth the ancestor is thought to live on in the realm of the spirit world, in a state of existence that Mbiti calls the “living dead”. This world of the ancestors is

pure, without sin and wrong-doing. Contrarily, wicked people like witches, may be ancestors but they do not have equal status with the morally sound 'living dead' in this perfect place.

It is now possible to appreciate why Caprivian families venerate their ancestors by performing certain rituals in order to maintain harmonious relations with them. Paris' position (1995:53) is that:

“The ancestral relationship continues for as there are persons alive who knew the person in the flesh. When historical memory ends, and no one can remember them by name, they may be said to have fully died”.

Must we now continue to demonize the ancestors? Perhaps the living can also be seen as a supportive group to the living dead, in a divine instituted division of labour. Hopefully, we can express agreement with Paris (1995:56), that:

“The mutual exchange of responsibilities and duties between the living and the dead and their families is reflective of the moral ethos in general. Harmony is the paramount goal within and among all the possible relationship within the cosmological order, and herein lies its ethical significance. As the source and justification of all moral obligations, the cosmological order implies the loyalty and obedience of each subordinate in the relationship. Negligence at any level can result in devastating consequences not only for the agent but also for his or her family as well as the larger tribal community”.

Individuality may not be conceived as less participatory in Caprivi because human beings do not have a life of their own, but must live for others. Life is a gift from God but it must be lived out in communion with others, for the common goal of all. Should not the church in Namibia hear the prophetic voice of God expressed in Olupona's position on the moral life? According to Olupona (2003: 120), “the life of the individual is understood as a participated life”. One may ask again, do not the members of the same tribe, clan, and family know that they live not a life of their own but that of the community? Olupona (2000:120) further states that:

“Africans believe firmly that there is a living communion or bond of life which makes for solidarity among members of the same family or clan.”

He continues to give a picture of the black African community which “forms a vital circuit where the members live in inter-dependence for their mutual advantage” Olupona (2000:120).

Has not John Calvin, Karl Barth, John Leith and John Yoder among others told us that reconciliation (described here as healing), is the goal of a moral life? Does not reconciliation bring healing to the mind, the family, the society, etc?

2.4.4 Healing

When we speak of healing, we also speak of sickness because there is no healing without a sickness. Nevertheless, the word, ‘sickness’ may not necessarily refer to body pains or the malfunctioning of cells in the body but could refer to an imbalance that needs healing, within the human being, the clan or within the community. Therefore, healing can be regarded as the restoration of harmony and wholeness in humanity and its relationships on a physical, psychological, social, moral, economic, political or spiritual level. When disharmony occurs, it is experienced as an illness in the community.

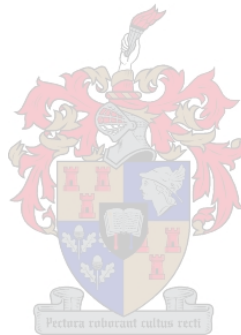
2.5 Conclusion

Caprivians can be described as communitarian because for them, to be is to belong and to belong entails an active involvement in community affairs, especially those that celebrate moral religious formation. As in most other African communities, the Caprivi is a religious milieu that takes traditions serious. Caprivians believe in the collective moral formation of the individual beginning from childhood. This is also based on the conviction that God, (the supreme being), is the creator and sustainer of nature and human beings, while ancestors are venerated as continuing family members who provide protection and guidance for the living.

Lamentably, the Seventh Adventist Church is the dominating Christian denomination in Caprivi. Hoekema (1963) observes that among the things the Seventh Day Adventist Church claims, is that they have a special sense of divine guidance which is not shared by other groups and that no part of human being lives after death. Hoekema accuses them of legalism especially in their preference of Sabbath observance to faith in Christ for salvation. Even the presence of other protestant churches in Caprivi has not helped matters. For example, the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa was introduced by the Dutch Reformed Church in the 1960s but being “Reformed”, as Dirkie Smit (2005:367) observes, the church should demonstrate faith and tradition that are continuously liberated from its own failures and idolatry, as one with enormous liberating potentials. However, this is not necessarily so but

the highlight is a theological perspective that seems insensitive to the plight of “individuals, groups, and categories of people who suffer from injustice, oppression, rejection, exclusion, violence, an abuse” (Smit 2005: 231).

But, if as Mbiti (1993:31) also observes, that: “neither the followers of African Religion nor those of Christianity are perfect”, perhaps it is time for the church in Namibia to take the initiative towards an ecumenical interactive ministry with Caprivian worldviews vis-à-vis, the church’s calling as ‘light’ to society? Again, should not reconciliation as preached by churches be demonstrated as “embodiment of memory and hope” (Vosloo 2001)? Whose ethical virtue assists us to assuage the pains of this “wounded body” (Vosloo 2001: 40) without offering “timeless, disembodied and abstract solutions that simplify and even trivialize the struggle and suffering of many” (Vosloo 2004:114), in this case, Caprivians? Perhaps the review of the book of Peter Paris will help us out. The question is, what then can we learn from all these?



CHAPTER 3: PETER PARIS' VIRTUE THEORY

3.1 Intellectual Biography of Paris

Drawing on an internet source⁶, the following biographical portrait of Paris can be given:

Born and brought up in Nova Scotia, Canada where he earned his B.A. and MDiv. degrees at Acadia University, Paris later became a naturalized African American citizen. He earned his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees at the University of Chicago which honoured him as an alumnus of the year in 1995. He has received honorary doctoral degrees from Acadia University (his alma mater); McGill University, Lehigh University, and Lafayette College.

Paris' publications include the following books: (a) *Black Religious Leaders: Unity in Diversity*; (b) *The Social Teaching of the Black Churches*; (c) *The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for a Common Moral Discourse* 1995. His most recent edited volume is *The History of the Riverside Church in the City of New York*. He has also co-edited other books, authored chapters in books and numerous essays in academic journals.

Paris holds several national offices, including the Presidency of the American Academy of Religion; the Society of Christian Ethics and the Society for the Study of Black Religion. He has served as Vice President of the Society for Values in Higher Education. He is a member of the editorial Boards of several theological and religious journals, including: The Journal of Religion; The Journal of the American Academy of Religion; Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal; Journal of Constructive Theology (South Africa); The Toronto Journal of Theology, and the Journal of African Theology in Ghana. Similarly, he is the General Editor of a series with New York University Press on Religion, Race and Ethnicity.

He has served on the Board of Trustees of the University of Chicago Divinity School and is presently on the Board of the New York Theological Seminary. He is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Princeton Young Achievers (an after-school program). Dr. Paris has lectured widely throughout Canada, the United States, and in several countries in Africa, such as; Nigeria, Ghana and South Africa.

He presently serves as the Principal Project Director of a multi-year Pan-African Seminar of Religious Scholars on Religion and Poverty which is funded by the Ford Foundation.

Dr. Peter J. Paris has been the Elmer G. Homrighausen Professor of Christian Social Ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary since 1985. Prior to coming to Princeton he taught on the faculties of Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, TN., and at Howard University School of Divinity in Washington D.C. he still alive and active as a Professor at

⁶ http://jamesjohnstonchair.dal.ca/johnston_6729.html

Princeton Theological Seminary. He lived and worked from 1961-1964 in Nigeria just after Nigeria gained its independence and was bursting with the energy of recovering its own African traditions.

These years of experience in Nigeria at the beginning of independence influenced his worldview on religion and the people of Africa.

3.2 Peter Paris' view of African and American Virtues

In the light of the comparable virtues of the Caprivian people with those of Christianity, this chapter will engage (come into a dialogue) with Paris's book, *"The Spirituality of African Peoples: The Search for Common Moral Discourse"*. Paris attempts a thorough investigation of the ethical virtues of the African and the African-American people. These virtues are described as a symbol of the long struggle of these respective communities for freedom and survival of their cultural virtues. Paris' book regards virtues as a moral character in cultures, releasing their social differences in different context. The book's goal is to promote moral ethical virtues for the family and community, especially with regard to community identity. The present chapter, therefore, provides a review and definition of ethics and virtue theory.

In another study, Paris claims that:

"The moral dimension of life comprises one of the most distinctive differences between human beings and other animals. Morality is expressive of the capacity to determine the quality of human activity by making choices in accordance with understandings of good or bad, right or wrong. As moral agents, human beings are able to perceive others as subjects, and their encounter with them they may choose to treat them either as subjects or as objects" (1985: 60).

In this sense, Paris is convinced that virtues should be described as ethics and he considers his viewpoint as that of an African in Diaspora and a Christian. He sees virtues as ethics of obedience to oneself, to the family and the community. For Paris, African traditional religion and cultures have survived for a long period despite the threat and influence of other religions and cultures around the world. As a result, the values of the indigenous culture in Africa are to be considered seriously because they are the same with those of Africans in the Diaspora, and act as a pointer to the people's spirituality.

Paris position typifies a religion of continuity of moral and religious experience of Africans and African Americans. They have in common the same message, the same goal, even though the religions express their central understanding of God in different ways. These differences can be appreciated and valued in spite of the diversity because the differences are not there to divide the people, but serve as an essence in the search of common morals in religion. Paris position appears quite tolerant, for an adherent of the Christian tradition; he does not condemn African religion but moves from a negative to a positive of outlook in which African and African American virtues are seen as being in continuity.

3.3 Influences

Paris' acknowledges in his introduction that constructions for moral discourse must search for and listen to the voices in Africa and their continuities in the African Americans. However, the sources he uses for the Eurocentric discourses of his researches such as Mbiti and Idowu are almost archaic in the light of more contemporary researches by scholars such as Appiah and Olupona. Paris' involvement with black churches influenced him to associate with the long struggle of the black community in Africa and in North America. He admits:

“I have always felt a certain kinship with the independent black churches in the United States in spite of the fact that my early life had been nurtured in an Eastern Canadian black church tradition that had much less autonomy than its counterpart in this country (*America*). That spirit of kinship, more than anything else, has motivated him to probe the dimensions of these denominations in order to discover their essence, that is, that which distinguishes them from the white denominations and designates their uniqueness” (1985:ix).

Paris's engagement with African scholars such as E. Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, J.N.K Mungambi, Adu Boahen, and B. G. M Sundler gives him more information on the subject of African virtues and he has been touched by the similarities of these virtues with the Diaspora, among other things around these communities. These African writers have contributed much to the subject of African virtues and ethics.

Magesa says that:

“The huge displacement and transfer of Africans to America by the slave trade negatively affected many channels of economic growth and cultural cohesion for the entire continent. The mutually destructive inter-ethnic conflicts promoted by the slave

hunters undermined traditional attachment to the development of the land and/or live stock. At the very least such development was greatly slowed. When chiefs and elders, in return for cheap rum, cloth or guns hunted down and handed over the vanquished or even their own people to foreign slave traders, they were destroying Africa's development potential in several ways" (2002:98).

For this reason, even though he sees some of the virtues in the Diaspora, Paris has a passion for African religions and virtues and therefore promotes its heritage in its cosmological and historical dimensions. He addresses the survival of African religions in the Diaspora, focusing on the values and the meaning of existence. His passion of looking at the continent is described by Lamin Sanneh with a comment in his book, *The Spirituality of African People*:

Dr. Paris returns ... an old question ...of African survivals and continuities in African American religious life and culture, and brings to his reformulation a fresh ethical sensitivity concerning the condition of black people in the contemporary age, Paris (1995, back cover page).



3.4 Paris' Virtue Theory

For Paris (1995), in trying to search for commonalities of virtues and moral experiences, he acknowledges that where-ever Africans may go they are united in one spirituality which underlies the traditions (in which virtues are born). He looks at African and African-American virtues as a determinative measure of values for all human activities. Moral attributes as a character constitutes the nature of the moral life and is rooted in and derived from God the creator.

Among the Caprivians the primary target of their virtues is life, and its preservation with the religious awareness that actions lead to good or evil. In the foregoing, we shall attempt to show that the virtues and values of the Caprivian people are similar to those of other African peoples.

In a similar way, Magesa (1997:31) says,

"For any religious orientation ... specifically for African Religion, the most important principles that determine the system of ethics revolve around the purpose or goal of human life."

Caprivian Christians have become culturally dominated by the norms and values of the Old Testament. But one cannot but agree with the following statement:

“African inheritance may help explain the greater faithfulness of African Americans to a biblical understanding of the covenant community, bodily wholeness, forgiveness and acceptance, rather than setting New Testament faith in the corrupting cultural context of our secular, individualistic market place consumerism”. (Glen Stassen, in: *Review and Expositor*, Vol. 92, 1995: 529).

Virtues have to be taught for all times and be continuously embodied by individuals as part of their social act to the community and family. The Caprivian Christian identity has been in crisis due to a cultural understanding and tradition that is the result of their history and cosmological understanding:

“Inheritance may help explain the greater faithfulness of African Americans to a biblical understanding of the covenant community, bodily wholeness, forgiveness and acceptance, rather than setting New Testament faith in the corrupting cultural context of our secular, individualistic market place consumerism.” (Glen Stassen, in: *Review and Expositor*, Vol. 92, 1995: 529).

Nowadays, virtues are being associated with Christian values and ethics and this leads to a dual practice of moral ethics. The Christian attitude towards Caprivian virtues and ethics is placed in a context of heresy, animism and primitivism caused by the Caprivians’ strange outlook towards other church traditions. Because of being regarded as primitive, Caprivian virtues are in turn neglected while the virtues of those who are regarded as civilised are copied.

The Caprivian concept of virtue profoundly influences the individual’s notion of right and wrong. One is raised for the common good and this is the whole essence of life. This understanding of life helps the people to accept their responsibilities toward their fellows and to the divinities, that is, their ancestors. Therefore, good moral conduct “is a practical goal that is deeply rooted in their cosmological thought and constitutive of all personal and public life” (Paris 1995: 131).

So virtues are concerned with a way of life and character and we may add that, each way of life will have its own characteristics that are peculiar to it. We are, of course, principally concerned with a Christian way of life which is leading in its beliefs and its ethics but each

way of life produces its own rules of living which is determined by the culture. Indeed, Africans judge the way they live and Paris (1995:131), opines that:

“Africans’ anthropocentrism does not imply either the superiority of human over other forms of life or a denial of the supremacy of the deity over all existence. Nor does it constitute a rationale justifying want on exploitation of humans over natural resources. It merely means that humans are at the center of a sacred cosmos in which they are expected to assume immense responsibilities for the preservation of its unity.”

Human superiority is discouraged within the community and personal accountability in maintaining a relationship with the ancestors is part of moral ethics within the community so as to be consciously kept in touch with the world of the spirits. Paris (1995:131) claims further that:

“It is the responsibility of humans to take the initiative in maintaining good communal relations with the invisible world of spirits. If they exercise their responsibilities well.

Traditionally African peoples were and remain thoroughly religious. They believe in God as the creator and sustainer of all, as well as in spirits, including the spirits of the dead. The idea here is that Africans also believe they have a covenant relationship with God. This understanding prepared them to easily adopt the Christian faith and to identify with the covenantal God of the bible who delivered the people of Israel from the hands of Egyptians. This mind-set also helped lots of Africans to cope with colonial powers and slavery.

Preservation of order and harmony within the community and with God and the spirits was considered the highest good, so they developed forgiveness, patience in adversity and the practice of hospitality. The central and highest goal of individuals was to serve the common good of the community.

Mbiti (1969:91) however, approaches African moral and virtues from a holistic viewpoint by saying that,

“Africans are holistic because they have a sacramental view of life which is expressed in mainly three characters: First, the practical goal of community life is the highest good, second, the relation between persons and invisible spirits play an important role, third, the nature of all Africans is in relation with the realm of life such spirits, history and nature. Mbiti emphasises these points by saying whatever science may do

to prove the existence or non-existence of the spirit are a reality and a reality which must be reckoned with, whether it is a clear, blurred or confused reality.”

By looking at the social ethics and virtues Paris (1985: 61) searches for a common basis for moral action within African spirituality. To find this basis, he joins the school of thought that seeks to establish whether or not there is a common African spirituality that pervades the diverse cultures of Africa which have survived the destroying experiences of colonial cultures. He therefore suggests that:

“At an early period, black Americans recognised the implications of loss of morality, a loss of their humanity... His concern for social ethics leads him to consider the whole horizon of human experience, ranging from the cosmologies it is a practical goal that is deeply rooted in their cosmological thoughts and constitutive of all personal and personal” by which they recall their beginnings to the specific moral obligations and virtue of individuals and communities.”

Writing from the perspective of his experiences as an African in Diaspora, and adopting the method of the insider seeking understanding, he articulates the African and African American moral and intellectual challenges to colonial and racist scholarship in social ethics. Paris’ book is aimed at constructing a common moral discourse based on the categories of God, community, family and person. He therefore asserts three premises upon which this discourse can be built:

- 1) the traditions of the African peoples, both on the African continent and in the Diaspora, are culturally diverse yet united in their underlying spirituality,
- 2) the realities of cultural diversity and the unity of African spirituality both separate and unite African and African American religious and moral traditions,
- 3) A dynamic principle of unity permeates the diversity of African cultural traditions.

Paris (1995) makes his case for a common context of African spirituality by exploring the integrally related and overlapping proportions of African cosmological and societal thoughts:

“Africans view religious devotion and good moral habits as necessary conditions for the prevention and the solution of most practical problems in daily life. It is virtually inconceivable for Africans to think of human existence apart from its dependence relationship on God, the divinities, and the ancestral spirits.”

He discusses the realms of spirit, of a tribal or ethnic community, family and the individual as unique features of communal relationships.

CHAPTER 4: CHRISTIAN AND CAPRIVIAN VIRTUES IN A DIALOGUE

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we shall examine in the light of Paris' work the need for a dialogue between the Christian faith and the Caprivian cultural virtues and moral values. In recent times, several scholars have viewed the concept of Christian ethics and virtues from various perspectives. The shift of our cultures from modern to post-modern has disadvantaged minority groups especially groups, with high level of illiteracy. The culture of the majority groups tends to dominate these minorities.

Dorr (1991: 153)'s observation is from a cultural angle. He states that:

“Since the first century, cultural ethics and its rich virtues have been decreasing.”

He calls this another form of oppression asserting also that:

“Minority groups in many countries of the world are treated as second class citizens. Their languages and traditions are ignored or despised” (1991:16).

He continues to argue that:

“In the first world today, people are in a situation analogous to that of the Latin American church prior to its conversion. The official church is failing people by not articulating their deepest religious instincts within them or even for them. This is the failure to empower people just as for centuries the masses of Latin America were deprived by church leaders of the empowerment they have at last been given in recent years” (1991:153).

However, the church should be the main pillar in the community to empower the people because it operates on a grass root level. It ought to be the place where the people can feel assured that the embodiment of the virtues is being practised.

In relating virtue to ethics, Carney (1978:435) also asserts that:

“The moral notion of virtue performs two fundamental functions in theological ethics. First, it indicates the kind of person who is to be rightly considered good, just, faithful, loving, holy, and so forth. As such, it provides both a normative complement to a merely descriptive account of human nature and ideal of human personhood at which to aim. Second, the notion of virtue offers an alternative to notion of obligation for the discernment of the morality of human act.”

For Smith (1982:113),

“Christian ethics may be viewed as rational activity or philosophical enquiry into the rules and principles of morality, of right and wrong conduct, of good and evil as they pertain to the beliefs and practices of the Christian faith in obedience to the will of God.”

These views put together arouse in us a call for dialogue between the virtues and ethics of the Caprivians and their Christian counterpart.

4.2 Challenge of and Need for Dialogue

In the foregoing, we shall attempt to show that the issue of dialogue between Caprivian ethics and Christian virtues and ethics should be addressed. Today's Caprivi, with a large Christian population is often seen as the future hope of Christianity in Namibia. Most Caprivians are now Christians and the quest for traditional virtues and ethics have been relegated to the background. This has resulted in a lot of internal and external spiritual challenges. A dialogue is here called upon today to develop a relevant agenda in our churches to address the cultural issues of the society. Wogaman, (1990:39-41) says:

“Christians must [...] make use of tradition, experience, and reason. By tradition is meant the conclusions to which prior Christian generations have come as they have struggled with issues and problems. By experience is meant the contemporary wisdom gained by individual Christians and their churches as they seek to live out the implications of their faith. By reason is meant the thoughtful reflection by Christian on the meaning of faith and the attempt to appropriate all forms of human knowledge in understanding and applying the faith. If the church's dialogue on moral questions is informed by all this, it will be rich indeed.”

This can lead to a new approach that allows the practices of religio-culture within the context of the people's background. The aim of the new approach is to create a two-way traffic, in which there is a willingness to listen to both parties, as opposed to a one-way traffic in which only one source enjoys attention. In view of this, there is a need for diversity in the Caprivian approach to church ethics and their value of judgement. The Christian church is now being confronted with the growing religio-culture of the people and also with their worldviews and ideologies. The claim of absoluteness and universality of the Christian faith is taken for

granted whereas it has more Western elements in it which do not allow for contextual meaning of the people's virtues.

Unfortunately this view is not the practice within the Caprivian church. Since many churches are planted within the region, it is taken for granted that there is no need for dialogue with the traditional cultures and virtues since people seemed to adapt to Christianity very easily. As any other African people, Caprivians struggle with internal forces which are at the root of their loss of identity. For instance, if we consider the church to have an impact on peoples' virtues it should allow their religion-culture to have a voice within the same environment. African religion wants to have its public involvement within the communities.

Magesa (1997:5) shows that:

“On the contrary, contact between Christianity and African Religion has historically been predominantly a monologue, bedevilled by assumptions prejudicial against the latter, with Christianity culturally more vocal and ideologically more aggressive. Therefore, what we have heard until now is largely Christianity speaking about the African Religion, not African Religion speaking for itself. This has been the case particularly in the area of moral or ethical thought, an important cornerstone of any religious system.”

It is a painful experience to die in silence, since very little is known of the Caprivian people and their virtues on ethics. It has often been said that their struggle with regard to Christian virtues, is a silent one. The hierarchical ideology planted among the religions that Christianity is the highest religion of the human race seems to be oppressive to the people's spirituality. Since Namibia was colonised by White South Africans who took strong biblical convictions on differences in ethnic, race, and tribal oppression, the Bible was viewed as promoting a certain race and the others as subjects of the elected people. In contrast to this worldview, Caprivians regard everybody as equal irrespective of tribe, colour or race. The dialogue has to begin to accommodate the people's context of history and cosmologies.

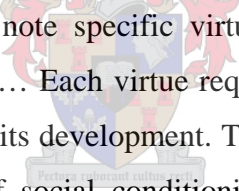
As a Christian one belongs to one's community and the community of faith. This means that one is not alone in the struggles of our/the world. In this system, a person can not behave the way he/she desires, but an individual should behave in a communal way which is in relation to others, considering others as important. This is a process Christianity may be seen as an on-going tradition in which the faithful continually discuss how to live the life to which they are called to live in unity with others. Because the church has a long history and has existed for

many years in different communities, it should not consider itself beyond transformation. There is a need for a cultural life within the context in which it is found.

The future lies in the available human resource which God is using for his church, but if the church is to practice independent moral formation, what practical and social consequences will this have for actual church life? In this sense, when considering adopting the virtues of the Caprivian people for use in the church, because moral life and thinking are by nature bodily and social, depending on the social context of the people. The argument of the matter is that the Caprivian virtues are alive and the quest is to see that these virtues are sustained on the long run by incorporating them into church ethics and practices.

4.3 Comparison with Paris' Theory

Many views are being expressed on the similarities between the virtues of Africans and those of African American people. However, Paris considers these similarities from a historical perspective. He writes:



“Within this framework we note specific virtues that are highly praised by both Africans African Americans. ... Each virtue requires a natural capacity and adequate social conditions that support its development. This does not mean that the virtues are produced by either nature of social conditioning. On the contrary, each virtue is acquired through the long process of proper habituation through teaching and practice. Many Africans practices, however, are communal in nature, namely, festivals, rituals, and ceremonial rites of passage, all of which are imbued with religious and moral meaning” (1995:136).

He further remarks that African virtues are communal, and it regulates one's behaviour making religio-culture ethics a necessity. Caprivian virtues and religious beliefs/practices serve to confirm the general observation of Paris on the subject. In as much as the aim of the African American virtues is to promote sound cultural ethics and stand on the necessity for traditional values, a common ground with Caprivian virtues is easily discernible. Hence, to recover cultural heritage in Africa there is a need to call on the value of our virtues.

It is our concern here that the relationship between Caprivian and Christian ethics be a healthy one, rather than allow Caprivian virtues sink into oblivion. Moreover, because Christian morality is based on communion and co-responsibility and these same virtues are found among the Caprivians, we therefore call for an entire review of the stance of the church in Namibia towards Caprivian virtues.

Paris (1995: 134) is convinced that:

“African and African American ethics is primary concerned with the development of a certain kind of moral character, a character that reflects the basic values of their respective communities morality pertains to the cultural ethos and, hence, is culturally specific. According to this perspective, there is no universal morality as such, even though some common moral values are widespread among diverse cultural groups”.

If the above statement that ‘there is no universal morality’, is considered true, therefore, it stands to reason to argue that the virtues of the Caprivian people reflect also their specific values and morality. However, the relationship between the virtues of the people and their adopted religion cannot be regarded as cordial. This seems to be a widespread trend in Christendom as articulated by Nelson (1992:11) below:

“From the beginning of the Enlightenment, however, this marriage between morality and religion began to show cracks. The ideas of a few philosopher spread gradually to other intellectuals and the upper class. [...] The secular system of values and norms distinguished the bourgeoisie both from the clergy with their official, church-bound moral doctrine and from the lower classes with their popular religion, devotions, and pious practices. The bourgeois ‘knows how to distinguish very well: secular morality and science for them, religion for the other’ (Groethuysen 1979, 1:17). But gradually, year by year, decade by decade, century by century, this secular morality also reached the middle and lower class. Ordinary people were thus increasingly influenced by the tendency to distinguish between morality and religion, and in the process they tended to forget the original religious roots of the moral practices by which they lived, the result of this is that it is not uncommon today to see the two domains, the moral and religious, set in opposition to each other, to hear people protest against any influence religion might still exert in the moral domain and seek to eliminate all reminders of it, as conflicts over the very presence of Bibles, crucifixes, or other religious symbols...”

Mungambi (1999:87) says that:

“Morals are seen as overt actions of man shape one’s personality. However, it is not enough to shape one’s behaviour in accordance with certain principles, it is important to deal with internal factors of action (faith and belief). For Christians, the Christian ethic is central. For St. Paul, ethical (moral) behaviour is a consequence of the right relationship to God. Christian behaviour consists of walking in obedience to the spirit of God. Therefore, morality and spirituality are interwoven.”

Spirituality is the cornerstone of the Caprivian people’s past, and it is also the basis for contemporary ethical and religious discussion. Among all African peoples the primary goal is their good relationship for others. Since the whole of life is sacred and since the moral virtue of individuals and that of the community are the same, African and African American ethics aims at enabling individual persons to become good so that they will also become good leaders in their respective communities (an ethics of the wise).

We would like to submit here therefore, that Paris’ virtues are in continuity with those of Caprivians in identity, and like their African American counterparts, Caprivian identity is seen in their virtues and ethics.



4.4 Moral Guidance

It is important to recall our earlier observation that the Caprivian ethical community is not restricted to the earthly community; it also includes the invisible world of the living-dead. The ancestors play an important role in shaping morality. Ancestors are moral guides to the living and it is believed that they impart wisdom. Idowu is convinced that:

“The real keynote of the Yoruba is neither in their noble ancestor nor in the past deeds of their heroes. The keynote of their life is their religion. In all things, they are religious. Religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principle of life for them. As far as they are concerned, the full responsibility of all the affairs of life belongs to the Deity; their own part in the matter is to do as they are ordered through the priests and diviners whom they believe to be the interpreters of the will of the Deity. Through all circumstances of life, through all its changing scenes, its joys and troubles, it is the Deity who is in control” (1962: 5).

Similarly, the Caprivian culture-religion is expressed in such a way that whatever one does is for the benefit of God and oneself, with the ancestors in the background as mediators of sort. Mbiti (1969:213) affirms thus:

“We can make a distinction between moral evil and natural evil. Moral evil pertains to what man does against his fellow man. There are customs, laws, regulations and taboos that govern conduct in society. Any breach of the right conduct amounts to a moral evil. We find endless examples of that in African societies. It is the opposite of cultivating or manifesting the virtue of good character. Indeed, we can say that good character is good because of good conduct it depicts. What lies behind the conception of moral good or evil, is ultimately the nature of the relationship between individuals in a given community or society. There is almost no secret sin: something or something is ‘bad’ or ‘good’ according to the outward conduct. A person is not inherently ‘good’ or ‘evil’, but he acts in ways which are ‘good’ when they conform to the customs and regulations of his community, or ‘bad’ (evil) when they do not.”

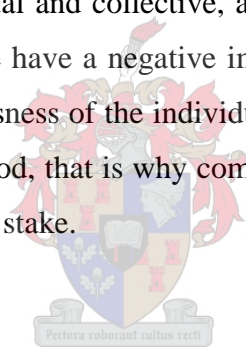
Seventh Day Adventist Church is an Old Testament oriented church, which gives the people of Caprivi a sense of their cultural values. However, Namibia is a secular country and this serves as a good platform for cultural practices which are in conflict with the Christian values/practices today. The moral setting of Caprivians and ethics therefore, suggest that there is no justice done to cultural practices and recognition of the virtues by the Christian ethical judgment. The challenge lies ahead in figuring out a Christological understanding between ancestors and Jesus Christ which seem to be the basis of the different understanding of the good news (gospel). The priority for the Caprivian Christians should be to glorify God and praise him with all their hearts and souls. The gospel of Jesus should be a part of the morals found in Caprivian story telling.

The participation in the fellowship with the triune God and the way people worship determine their ethics, their communal lives and doctrines. We therefore agree with Koopmans’ (2006:7) quotation of Wogaman who does an analysis of the major Christian doctrines and who concludes that an appreciation and encouragement of moral formation is both a theological and an anthropological activity. He states that:

“An endeavor in which human beings participate with the triune God is supported by Christian theology. As persons created in the image of God human beings do have capabilities of authority, freedom, creativity, rationality and relationality that enable them to participate in moral formation.”

Caprivians are to participate in the Christian faith through their tradition and virtues such as hospitality, forbearance, forgiveness, and respect for nature, history and God which seem to be slowly dying. However, we are inclined to observe in another sense, that these cultural values and virtues may not be really dead yet, but are neglected by the “new religion” – Christianity.

The issue presently is, how Caprivian morals and virtues which have become weakened over time by new traditions can receive fresh strength. The problem is the ambivalent ethical practices of the Caprivian people and the realities of how their lives need a new approach to moral virtues. Mugambi (1999:85) says that there has been a growing trend in Africa, particularly in Kenya in which what one believes and does in private is considered a private matter. With the advent of Christianity and Western culture, life has become compartmentalized into private and public sectors. This explains the existing dichotomy between public and private, individual and collective, and above all lack of “accountability” in different spheres of life. All these have a negative impact on the world-view of people in Africa - the idea is that the consciousness of the individual in doing good or evil is within the context of family, community and God, that is why community develop good virtues because it is not an individual alone who is at stake.



Farley says that:

“It is possible for the virtues, or even a theory of virtues, to contribute toward the best-ordering of society in a pluralistic age. Nonetheless, the virtues are significant and have the capacity to unite human beings around a core of mutually respected attitudes and values that, in turn, have the power to shape actions and judgments toward achieving what is good in any culture and order any form of government, e.g. duties of fidelity, gratitude, justice, beneficence, self-improvement, and nonviolence are essentially “person-enhancement” values that underlie the hopes and sentiments of all people” (1995:173/4).

Farley continues to maintain that these listed virtues of duties which define human existence as much as self-enhancement does, remind the society on the one hand, that the individual lives for more than the self, and that human beings are incomplete when they are apart from one other. On the other hand, the virtues unite the religious people. The commitment to the virtues advance one’s sense of self and, therefore, one’s experience of the good; and it

advances one's neighbor's good, thereby, in the Christian faith promotes God's desired will for all.

The relevance and the power of the Caprivian virtues is demonstrated when the community is faced with crisis. This is the time that people return to their original way of doing things. For instance, in the case of an untimely death, fortune tellers or diviners are often consulted to find out what happened. This consciousness among other things points to the relevance of the beliefs of the community and the seriousness of cultural challenges in Christian religion.

4.5 Conclusion

Finally, in answering the research question; 'What can the church learn from the local virtues of the Caprivian people?'; the Vatican's declaration below proffers a suitable solution:

"The church gives primary consideration [...] to what human beings have in common and to what promotes fellowship among them. For all people comprise a single community, and have a single origin, since God made the whole race of men dwell over the entire face of the earth...one also is their final goal: GOD⁷". Farley (1995: 175/6)

This God is being revealed in stories in Caprivi and faith is developed due to the historical tales about God which are told in a way that admits the realities of this world. The Caprivian people's view of God as the Supreme Being, the original source of life and all forms of life and the creator of all things, prevails in their minds and in their historical understanding of God. The view has enabled them to build dependence on God and on one another. This sense of dependence also becomes a source of virtue which builds and shapes the community.

In the encounter between Caprivian anthropocentric virtues and Christian theocentric morals in the church, therefore, one tends to wonder if there is room for cultural ethics in the current gospel. It is our submission that the religio-culture of the Caprivians consists of virtues which can be properly harnessed for the teaching of morals by the Christian community. Since story telling is a means of transmitting rich tradition through the ages, the telling of these virtues remains the basic principle for passing them to the next generation. This method can be equally adopted by the church in Caprivi as it lends credence to the admonition that "faith comes by hearing...." (Rom. 10:17).

⁷ Declaration on the relationship of the church to non-christian religions, The document of the Vatican ii

In the light of the overall discussion on the people of Caprivi in this study, their background history, their worldviews and their similarities to other African cultures around the continent, the call here is for the people and the church to go back to their virtues and articulate those values which can be used for the common good.



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